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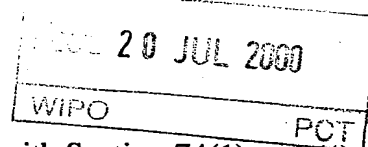
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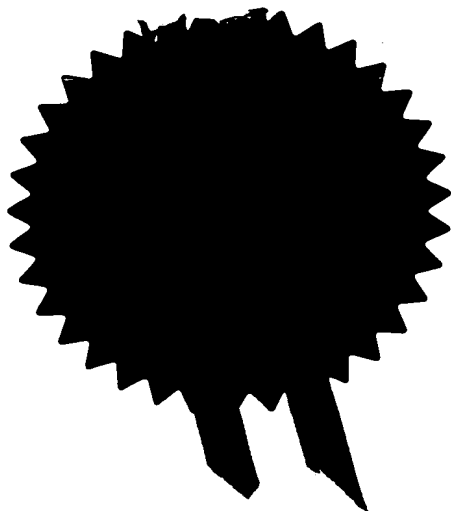
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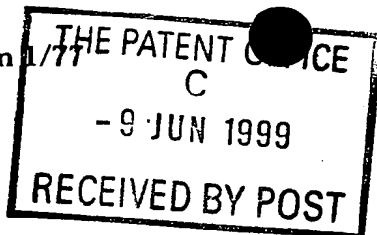
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2. Patent application number
(The Patent Office will fill in this part) JUN 1999 9913283.9
3. Full name, address and postcode of the or of each applicant (underline all surnames)

Malvern Scientific Solutions Limited
137 Church Street, Malvern, Worcestershire
WR14 2AN

Patents ADP number (if you know it) 753734-3001

If the applicant is a corporate body, give the country/state of its incorporation United Kingdom
4. Title of the invention

SYMBOL COMMUNICATION (ENTRY AND OUTPUT)
SYSTEM AND METHOD
5. Name of your agent (if you have one)

DEREK JACKSON ASSOCIATES
~~The Haven, Plough Road~~
~~Tibberton, Droitwich~~
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Description

Claim(s)

Abstract

Drawing(s) 6 + 6



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7 Jun 1999

12. Name and daytime telephone number of person to contact in the United Kingdom

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SYMBOL COMMUNICATION (ENTRY AND OUTPUT) SYSTEM AND METHOD

This invention relates to a symbol communication (entry and output) system and method of communicating symbols (symbol input and output) which may be employed, for example, for the entry of symbols such as text and/or other symbols by means other than a keyboard and for the output of symbols in a non-alphanumeric manner.

10 The "QWERTY" keyboard is the most widely used symbol/text entry system. However, for certain applications its many keys, often over 100, occupy an inconveniently large area or, in the alternative, are inconveniently small for ready access by fingers or another pointing device. A mobile user can additionally find the need for a horizontal support surface at a convenient height problematic.

Many other symbol/text entry systems have been developed, including some for single-handed use. None has acquired a degree of popularity on the scale of the QWERTY keyboard. Some are relatively large and many require the user to remember complex combinations of keystrokes which make them difficult to use. Such known symbol/text entry systems are particularly difficult for use by disabled persons where a small number of relatively simple movements is to be desired. Speed of symbol/text entry is important to both novice and skilled users. Additionally, it is desirable for such symbol/text entry system to communicate with the

user with the same small number of relatively simple movements and such known symbol/text entry systems provide no such way of communicating with a user.

5 It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide a symbol communication system and method which overcomes or at least reduces the disadvantages of known systems.

10 According to one aspect of the present invention there is provided a symbol entry system comprising means defining a plurality of symbol entry regions, each of which regions has associated therewith a plurality of symbols, and means responsive to a user-controlled pointing device whereby a
15 desired symbol can be selected by movement of the pointing device in a predetermined direction within the region with which the desired symbol is associated.

According to another aspect of the present invention there
20 is provided a method of symbol entry in which a plurality of symbols are associated with each of a plurality of symbol entry regions and a desired symbol is selected by movement of a pointing device in a predetermined direction within the region with which the desired symbol is
25 associated.

In one embodiment of the invention there are eight symbol entry regions, each region having associated therewith four

symbols arranged in an orthogonal manner, a desired symbol being selected by movement within the region having the desired symbol associated therewith in a predetermined orthogonal direction relative to the desired symbol. The
5 eight regions may be provided substantially in an octagonal arrangement.

In another embodiment of the invention there are eight
10 symbol entry regions, each region having associated therewith three symbols arranged in a linear manner, a desired symbol being selected by movement to the respective region followed by further radial or circumferential movement to select the desired symbol within the respective region. The eight regions may be provided substantially in
15 an octagonal arrangement.

In a further embodiment of the invention there are four
20 symbol entry regions, each region having associated therewith six or eight symbols arranged in a predetermined manner, for example at the corners of a square and substantially midway between predetermined adjacent corners, such as along the top and bottom of each region, a desired symbol being selected by movement within the region having the desired symbol associated therewith in a
25 predetermined direction relative to the desired symbol. The four regions may be provided substantially in a quadrilateral arrangement or substantially in a linear arrangement.

In a further embodiment of the invention there are three symbol entry regions, each region having associated therewith eight symbols arranged in a predetermined manner, for example at the corners of a square and substantially
5 midway between adjacent corners, a desired symbol being selected by movement within the region having the desired symbol associated therewith in a predetermined direction relative to the desired symbol. Where the three regions are intended to be operated with a user's finger, the
10 regions may arranged in a substantially linear manner with the central region displaced so as to accommodate the user's middle finger length.

In a further embodiment of the invention there are five
15 symbol entry regions, each region having associated therewith up to four symbols arranged in a predetermined manner, for example at the corners of a square, a desired symbol being selected by movement within the region having the desired symbol associated therewith in a predetermined
20 direction relative to the desired symbol. The regions may arranged in a substantially linear manner. Two sets of symbol entry regions may be provided, one for each hand. Alternatively, or additionally, two sets of symbol entry regions may be arranged substantially parallel to each
25 other for alternative symbol entry. Further symbol entry regions may be provided if desired.

One or more further regions may be provided separated from the first-mentioned regions for toggling between the first-mentioned set of symbols and one or more further sets of symbols to be associated with each of the regions. For
5 example, a plurality of further regions may be provided around the periphery of the first-mentioned regions and/or a single further region may be provided centrally of the first-mentioned regions.

10 Means may be provided for selecting a further symbol arranged within an area encompassed by or adjacent to the first-mentioned symbols of each region by tapping the area within the desired region.

15 Means may be provided for selecting further symbols by employing a combination of movements. Combined movements may include a curvilinear movement, linear movement with a dwell at the beginning and/or end thereof (for example to select upper case letters), a linear movement in a first
20 direction followed by one or more further linear movements reversing the preceding movement, two sequential linear movements either at right-angles to each other or at another predetermined angle to each other (for example to mimic all or part of the desired symbol).

25

The regions may be provided on a touch-sensitive pad or screen or may be displayed on a screen with symbols being selected by way of a remote pointing device.

Alternatively, the regions may be provided on sheet material in order that a user can indicate each desired symbol in turn.

5 According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a symbol output system comprising means defining a plurality of symbol output regions, each of which regions has associated therewith a plurality of symbols, and means movable within each region whereby a
10 desired symbol can be indicated by movement of the movable means in a predetermined direction or at a predetermined location within the region with which the desired symbol is associated.

15 According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of symbol output in which a plurality of symbols are associated with each of a plurality of symbol output regions and a desired symbol is indicated by movement of a movable means in a predetermined
20 direction or at a predetermined location within the region with which the desired symbol is associated.

A separate movable means may be provided for each region, for example a pin which is movable in orthogonal and/or
25 diagonal directions. Alternatively, the movable means may be provided at each symbol location, such as an extendable pin or a piezo device.

In one embodiment of the invention there are eight symbol output regions, each region having associated therewith four symbols arranged in an orthogonal manner, a desired symbol being indicated by movement of the movable means within the region having the desired symbol associated therewith in a predetermined orthogonal direction. The eight regions may be provided substantially in an octagonal arrangement.

10 In another embodiment of the invention there are eight symbol output regions, each region having associated therewith three symbols arranged in a linear manner, a desired symbol being indicated by movement of the movable means to the respective region followed by further radial or circumferential movement to indicate the desired symbol within the respective region. The eight regions may be provided substantially in an octagonal arrangement.

20 In a further embodiment of the invention there are four symbol output regions, each region having associated therewith eight symbols arranged in a predetermined manner, for example at the corners of a square and substantially midway between adjacent corners, a desired symbol being selected by movement of the movable means within the region having the desired symbol associated therewith in a predetermined direction. The four regions may be provided substantially in a quadrilateral arrangement or substantially in a linear arrangement.

In a further embodiment of the invention there are three symbol output regions, each region having associated therewith eight symbols arranged in a predetermined manner, for example at the corners of a square and substantially
5 midway between adjacent corners, a desired symbol being indicated by movement of the movable means within the region having the desired symbol associated therewith in a predetermined direction.

10 Means may be provided for indicating further symbols by employing a combination of movements of the movable means. Combined movements may include a linear movement with a dwell at the beginning and/or end thereof, a linear
15 movement in a first direction followed by a further linear movement in the opposite direction, two sequential linear movements either at right-angles to each other or at another predetermined angle to each other (for example to mimic all or part of the desired symbol).

20 For a better understanding of the present invention and to show more clearly how it may be carried into effect reference will now be made, by way of example, to the accompanying drawings in which:

25 Figure 1 is a diagrammatic illustration of one embodiment of a symbol entry system and method according to the present invention;

Figure 2 is a diagrammatic illustration of another embodiment of a symbol entry system and method according to the present invention;

5 Figures 3a, 3b and 3c are a diagrammatic illustration of an embodiment of a symbol entry system and method according to the present invention which is a development of that shown in Figure 2;

10 Figures 4a and 4b are a diagrammatic illustration of an embodiment of a symbol entry system and method according to the present invention which is a development of that shown in Figure 1;

15 Figure 5 is a diagrammatic illustration of an embodiment of a symbol entry system and method according to the present invention which is a development of that shown in Figures 4a and 4b;

20 Figures 6a, 6b and 6c are a diagrammatic illustration of an embodiment of a symbol entry system and method according to the present invention which is a development of that shown in Figures 3a, 3b and 3c;

25 Figures 7a and 7b are a diagrammatic illustration of an embodiment of a symbol entry system and method according to the present invention which is a development of that shown in Figure 2;

Figure 8 is a diagrammatic illustration of an embodiment of a symbol entry system and method according to the present invention which is a modification of that shown in Figures 3a, 3b and 3c;

5

Figure 9 is a diagrammatic illustration of an embodiment of a symbol entry system and method according to the present invention which is a modification of Figures 4a and 4b;

10

Figure 10 is a diagrammatic illustration of a modification of the symbol entry system and method of Figure 9;

15

Figure 11 is a diagrammatic illustration of an embodiment of a symbol entry system and method according to the present invention which is a modification of that shown in Figures 3a, 3b and 3c;

20

Figure 12 is a diagrammatic illustration of an embodiment of a symbol entry system and method according to the present invention and adapted for two-handed use; and

25

Figure 13 is a diagrammatic illustration of one embodiment of a symbol output system and method according to the present invention.

Conventional keyboards are operated by pressing one or more keys at one or more specific locations. The keys are not triggered until a specific pressure is exceeded or a

predetermined proximity is attained. Each key generates a single specific output, although the output may be modified in dependence on the use of further keys, such as a "shift", "alt" or "caps lock" key.

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In contrast to a conventional keyboard, the symbol entry system shown in Figure 1 comprises an octagonal arrangement of eight trapezoidal regions 1 which is best suited to use by way of a pointing device in the form of a movable cursor 3, but could alternatively be printed on a sheet of card or the like for manual use. The cursor 3 may be operated by a number of devices such as a mouse or track-ball, touch-pad or head-controlled optical tracker. Substantially at the centre of the regions 1 is a central octagonal region 5 which can be used for initiating symbol entry.

20

25

The cursor 3 is moved from the central region 5 into one of the trapezoidal regions 1 to activate a number of symbols 7. For example, the cursor may be moved up to activate the letters A, B, C and D. The cursor 3 is then moved out of the activated region 1 in a predetermined direction to select the desired letter, for example horizontally to the right to select the letter B. The cursor 3 is then returned to the central region 5 to initiate selection of the next symbol. The eight regions 1 and four (orthogonal) directions for each region enable any one of thirty-two symbols 7 to be readily selected.

Around the periphery of the octagonal arrangement of regions 1 can be provided a number of mode change regions 9 which can be used, for example where the regions 1 are displayed on a computer or like screen, to change the nature of the regions displayed so as to provide a different set of symbols 7 such as to change between lower case and upper case, to display numerals or control domestic or other appliances. Thus, the user can toggle between a number of different sets of symbols.

10

The symbol entry system shown in Figure 2 comprises a quadrilateral (or orthogonal) arrangement of regions 11 provided on a touch-sensitive pad 13 (such as that found on many portable computers) or a touch-sensitive screen and which may be operated by a pointing device in the form of a single finger or pointing stick. Each region 11 has eight symbols 15 associated with it to allow selection of any one of those symbols by movement of the pointing device in the appropriate direction. When operated by finger, although only a single finger should touch the pad 13 at any one time, one to four fingers can actually be used for text entry. Where four fingers are to be used, one for each region, a horizontal layout of the four regions 11 is preferred to the quadrilateral arrangement shown in Figure 2. The position of a finger within a region 11 is not critical and, although the direction of movement needs to distinguish between adjoining directions, the precise

direction is not critical and operation of the system is very user-friendly.

5 A further option when employing a touch-sensitive pad is the use of "hover film" or the like which allows the user to rest one or more fingers on a surface without triggering the touch-sensitive pad unless a predetermined downward pressure is applied to the hover film. Such an arrangement is particularly convenient for applications where there is
10 no other form of support for the fingers being used. The hover film may comprise an elastomeric film stretched about 1 mm above the touch-sensitive pad or may comprise a pressure-sensitive sensor within the touch-sensitive pad itself.

15 The use of an octagonal or quadrilateral layout of regions allows for intuitive and physiologically convenient movements (swiping) in up-down, side-to-side or diagonal directions without the need for undue precision. In the
20 embodiments of both Figure 1 and Figure 2 the symbol selected is dependent on the combination of the location of a movement of a pointing device and the direction of that movement. While other numbers of regions and directions could be used, the use of eight or four locations with
25 either four or eight directions provides for very user-friendly and intuitive movements while at the same time providing a sufficient number of symbols for a useful text entry system. Additional functions and/or symbols can be

obtained by allocating a key to change the symbols associated with a region, for example to upper case, numerals, or to control other functions (for example domestic appliances such as televisions and/or hifi systems). To assist in orientating the pointing device, the surface of the touch-sensitive pad or screen (or other symbol entry surface or means) may be provided with tactile means, such as vertical and/or horizontal grooves.

The symbols may provide for the letter-for-letter entry of text or alternatively may be used as the input for a text input system involving disambiguation such as that described in WO-A-9833111. The system may incorporate an audio or video/visual response or output corresponding for example to the symbol or symbols entered in order to provide the user with feedback that the desired symbol or symbols has or have been selected. Additionally, the entry of one or more symbols may be used as part of a prediction means for a letter, word or the like in known manner.

Moreover, the symbol entry system and method according to the invention may incorporate a spell checker in order to eliminate typographical errors resulting, for example, from selecting the wrong symbol in any particular region (such as by selecting the incorrect adjacent direction of movement) or from selecting the wrong region, but making the movement in the correct direction.

The symbol entry system shown in Figures 3a, 3b and 3c is a development of that shown in Figure 2. As shown in Figures 3a, 3b and 3c there are three regions 21 provided on a touch-sensitive pad 23 (or, alternatively, each region may comprise a touch sensitive pad), each of which regions may be operated by a pointing device in the form of a separate finger. To facilitate operation of the symbol entry system the central region is displaced relative to the outer regions to accommodate the longer middle finger. Each region 21 has eight symbols 25 associated with it around the periphery thereof in a predetermined arrangement at the corners of a square and substantially midway between adjacent corners to allow selection of any one of those symbols by movement of a finger in the appropriate direction and a ninth symbol 27 which is selected by a tapping motion within the appropriate region 21. Although the arrangement of symbols could be altered, in the illustrated embodiment as shown in Figure 3a lower case letters are selected by a simple swiping movement in the appropriate direction (up, down, sideways or diagonal). Upper case letters are selected by holding a finger within the required region for a predetermined time at the beginning and/or end of a letter selection movement. Further symbols are selected as shown in Figure 3b by a predetermined right-angled swiping movement involving a combination of an up or down movement followed by a sideways movement or vice versa. Still further symbols as shown in Figure 3c are selected by a swiping movement in a

predetermined direction followed by a further swiping movement reversing the first movement (that is a back-and-forth movement).

5 The use of three regions 21, allowing three finger operation, is a good compromise as regards size and ease of operation. The user's thumb and fourth finger can act as supports for the three remaining fingers and maintain the three remaining fingers just above the respective region.

10 The eight directions of movement facilitate reliable and convenient symbol selection, combining a sufficient number of alternatives while avoiding a need for unrealistic precision. The ninth "tap" movement provides an intuitive selection for a space and permits selection from sufficient

15 symbols to define the entire alphabet with only three regions. The selection of upper case letters by a swiping movement followed by a dwell is simple and intuitive to use. The right-angle movements of Figure 3b and the swipe and return movements of Figure 3c are simple and efficient

20 to use (and are readily detected) and avoid the need to toggle between different modes in order to select further sets of symbols.

25 The symbol entry system shown in Figures 4a and 4b is a development of that shown in Figure 1. As shown in Figures 4a and 4b there are eight rectangular regions 31 provided on a touch-sensitive pad 33 or screen such as the face of a watch or the like, which regions may be operated by a

suitable pointing device such as a pointing stick or finger. As with the embodiment of Figure 1, the eight regions 31 are generally arranged in the form of an octagon. Each region 31 has three symbols 35 associated with it to allow selection of any one of those symbols by movement of the pointing device firstly in the appropriate direction for that region 31 and secondly either further in a radial direction for the middle symbol or, for the outer symbols, in the circumferential direction of the required symbol within the desired region. Although the arrangement of symbols could be altered, in the illustrated embodiment as shown in Figure 4a lower case letters are selected by a simple straight or right-angle swiping movement in the appropriate direction. Upper case letters are selected by holding the pointing device stationary at the beginning and/or end of the swiping movement for a predetermined time. By tapping anywhere in the octagon it is possible to toggle between the first set of symbols and a second set of symbols as shown in Figure 4b, and an individual symbol from the second set can be chosen in the same way as described above in respect of Figure 4a.

The symbol entry system shown in Figure 5 is a modification of that shown in Figures 4a and 4b and can advantageously be used where there is sufficient space for two touch-sensitive pads 41 or screens. On each pad 41 there are defined eight rectangular regions 43 arranged generally in the form of an octagon and in operation the two touch-

sensitive pads of Figure 5 are used in the same way as the single pad of Figures 4a and 4b, except there is no need to toggle between two sets of symbols 45.

5 The symbol entry system shown in Figures 6a, 6b and 6c is a modification of that shown in Figures 3a, 3b and 3c. As with Figures 3a, 3b and 3c, there are three regions 51 provided on a touch-sensitive pad 53 (or three separate touch-sensitive pads) or screen, each of which regions 51
10 may be operated by a pointing device in the form of a separate finger. As in Figure 3, the central region in Figure 6 is displaced (offset) to accommodate the longer middle finger. Each region 51 in Figure 6a has eight symbols 55 associated with it and disposed around the
15 periphery thereof in a predetermined arrangement at the corners of a square and substantially midway between adjacent corners to allow selection of any one of those symbols by movement of a finger in the appropriate direction and a ninth symbol 57 which is selected by a
20 tapping motion within the appropriate region. As with Figure 3a, in the embodiment of Figure 6a lower case letters are selected by a simple swiping movement in the appropriate direction (up, down, sideways or diagonal) and upper case letters are selected by additionally holding the
25 finger within the selected region 51 for a predetermined time at the end of a letter selection movement. Further symbols 59 are selected as shown in Figure 6b either by holding the finger stationary for a predetermined time at

the beginning of a symbol selection movement or by making a predetermined multidirectional swiping movement, such as those illustrated in the upper part of the right-hand region of Figure 6b in which the movement at least partly mimics the shape of the symbol concerned. Still further symbols 59 as shown in Figure 6c are selected by a swiping movement in a predetermined direction followed by a further swiping movement reversing the first movement (that is a back-and-forth movement) and by more complex movements mimicking the shape of the symbol concerned. Such complex movements may mimic symbols such as %, & and @ or may permit a sketch to be made.

The symbol entry system shown in Figures 7a and 7b is a development of that shown in Figure 2. As shown in Figures 7a and 7b there are four regions 61 provided on a touch-sensitive pad 63 or screen and arranged in a quadrilateral, each of which regions 61 may be operated by a pointing device in the form of a single finger or pointing stick. Each region 61 has eight symbols 65 associated with it and disposed around the periphery thereof (for example at the corners of a square and midway between adjacent corners) to allow selection of any one of those symbols by movement of a finger or the like in the appropriate direction and a ninth symbol 67 which is selected by a tapping motion within the appropriate region. Although the arrangement of symbols could be altered, in the illustrated embodiment as shown in Figure 7a lower case letters are selected by a

simple swiping movement in the appropriate direction (up, down, sideways or diagonal), while upper case letters are selected by holding a finger or the like within the desired region 61 for a predetermined time at the end of a symbol selection movement. Further symbols 69 are selected as shown in Figure 7b by holding a finger or the like within the desired region for a predetermined time at the start of a symbol selection movement and by more complex movements mimicking the shape of the symbol concerned. Such complex movements may mimic symbols such as £ and \$ or may permit a sketch to be made.

The symbol entry system shown in Figure 8 is a modification of that shown in Figures 3a, 3b and 3c. There are three regions 71 provided on a touch-sensitive pad 73 (or, alternatively, each region may comprise a touch sensitive pad), each of which regions may be operated by a pointing device in the form of a separate finger. To facilitate operation of the symbol entry system the central region may be displaced (not shown in Figure 8) relative to the outer regions to accommodate the longer middle finger. Each region 71 has eight symbols 75 associated with it around the periphery thereof in a predetermined arrangement at the corners of a square and substantially midway between adjacent corners to allow selection of any one of those symbols by movement of a finger in the appropriate direction and a ninth symbol 77 which is selected by a tapping motion within the appropriate region 71. Although

the arrangement of symbols could be altered, in the illustrated embodiment as shown in Figure 8 the inner symbols are selected by a simple swiping movement in the appropriate direction (up, down, sideways or diagonal).

5 The outer symbols are selected by a swiping movement in a predetermined direction followed by a further swiping movement reversing the first movement (that is a back-and-forth movement). Upper case letters are selected by holding a finger within the required region for a
10 predetermined time at the beginning or end of a letter selection movement (for example a dwell at the beginning of a movement for the inner symbols and a dwell at the end of a movement for the outer symbols). Space, backspace and new line symbols are selected by a tap within the
15 appropriate region, while the # symbol is reserved for toggling between the illustrated symbols and a further set of symbols or for toggling a further function such as to activate speech output.

20 The symbol entry system shown in Figure 9 is a modification of that shown in Figures 4a and 4b. In the embodiment of Figure 9 there are eight regions 81 provided on a touch-sensitive pad 83 or screen such as the face of a watch or the like, which regions may be operated by a suitable
25 pointing device such as a pointing stick or finger. As with the embodiment of Figures 4a and 4b, the eight regions 81 are generally arranged in the form of an octagon. Each region 81 has two sets of three symbols 85 associated with

it, the inner set being selected by a simple swiping movement in the direction of the appropriate region and the outer set being selected by a dwell of predetermined duration at the beginning of the swiping movement. The
5 desired symbol is then selected by a radial swiping movement for the middle symbol or, for the outer symbols, by a swiping movement in the appropriate circumferential direction of the required symbol within the desired region. A single tap anywhere in the octagon represents a space,
10 while a double tap represents a backspace.

Figure 10 is a simplification of the embodiment of Figure 9 in that only the central symbol of most sets is shown to remind the user of the symbols of each set. The
15 arrangement of Figure 10 improves visibility of the symbols displayed where the overall symbol entry area is relatively small.

It should be noted the number of symbols in each set could
20 be increased from three to four if two symbols can be selected by the radial swiping movement, the outer symbol being selected by a single outward radial movement and the inner symbol being selected by a radially inward swiping movement after the outward movement. In this way the eight
25 separate regions can be used to enter up to sixty-four symbols.

The symbol entry system shown in Figure 11 is a modification of that shown in Figures 3a, 3b and 3c there are four regions 91 provided on a touch-sensitive pad 93 (or, alternatively, each region may comprise a touch sensitive pad), each of which regions may be operated by a pointing device in the form of a separate finger. Each region 91 has six symbols 95 associated with it around the periphery thereof in a predetermined arrangement at the corners of a square and at the top and bottom substantially midway between adjacent corners to allow selection of any one of those symbols by movement of a finger in the appropriate direction and a seventh symbol 97 which is selected by a tapping motion within the appropriate region 91. The avoidance of horizontal movements can be more ergonomically efficient in certain circumstances. Although the arrangement of symbols could be altered, in the illustrated embodiment as shown in Figure 11 most lower case letters (the inner symbols) are selected by a simple swiping movement in the appropriate direction (up, down or diagonal). The outer symbols are selected by a swiping movement in the desired direction followed by a movement in the reverse direction. Upper case letters are selected by holding a finger within the required region for a predetermined time at the beginning and/or end of a letter selection movement. Further symbols, such as space, backspace and new line, are selected by tapping within the appropriate region 91.

The symbol entry system shown in Figure 12 is adapted for use by two hands and comprises an arrangement of two rows of five regions 101 for each hand provided on a touch-sensitive pad 103 or a touch-sensitive screen and which may each be operated by a pointing device in the form of a different finger. Each region 101 in the lower rows has four symbols 105 (primarily letters in the illustrated embodiment) associated with it to allow selection of any one of those symbols by movement of the pointing device in the appropriate up, down or sideways direction, while each region 101 in the upper rows generally has two symbols 105 (primarily numerals and the usual PC function keys) associated with it to allow selection of any one of those symbols by movement in the appropriate up or down direction. Further regions 107 may be provided for additional functions such as shift and control. Such further regions 107 may comprise conventional keys and/or switches. The arrangement of Figure 12, by employing both hands, provides a particularly simple (and therefore fast) set of finger movements for symbol entry.

Thus the present invention is able to provide a compact, low-cost, user-friendly symbol/text entry system which is suitable for use in a wide range of applications, including personal computer access and text input for mobile computer systems, numeric input for dialling with mobile telephones and text entry for some physically disabled users who find a QWERTY keyboard difficult. If desired, the symbol entry

system and method may be adapted to employ the user's thumb to enter a space. An additional region may be provided in an area where the thumb would naturally fall and can either enter a space when the thumb is urged against the touch-sensitive pad or, when the thumb is used as a support, to enter a space when the thumb is lifted from the pad.

Figure 13 illustrates an embodiment of a symbol output system and method according to the present invention in which a linear array of symbol output regions 111 are arranged on an output pad 113 or the like. Each output region 111 is in the form of an octagonal gate array which allows movement of a symbol indicating pin 115 in orthogonal and diagonal directions in order to indicate different symbols 117. Movement of the pins 115 may be controlled by any suitable linear actuating means. Thus movement of a single one of the pins 115 in a predetermined direction can be used to indicate a single symbol 117 and a sequence of such movements can be used to indicate a sequence of symbols. The sequence of symbols can be identified visually or can be identified by movement against a user's skin (such as the palm of a hand). As an alternative to a movable pin some form of vibrating means, such as a piezo device or an extending pin, can be located at each symbol.

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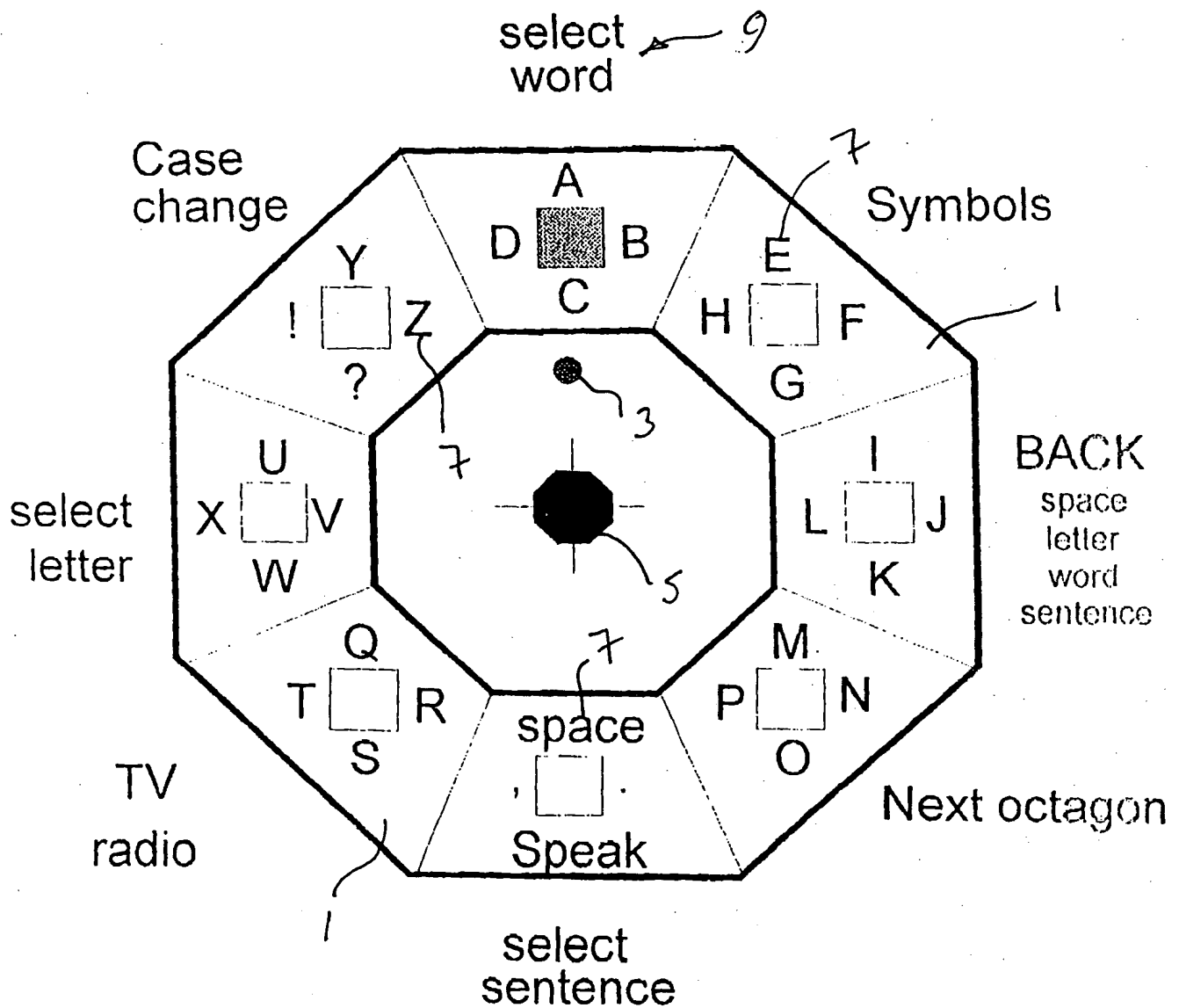


Fig. 1

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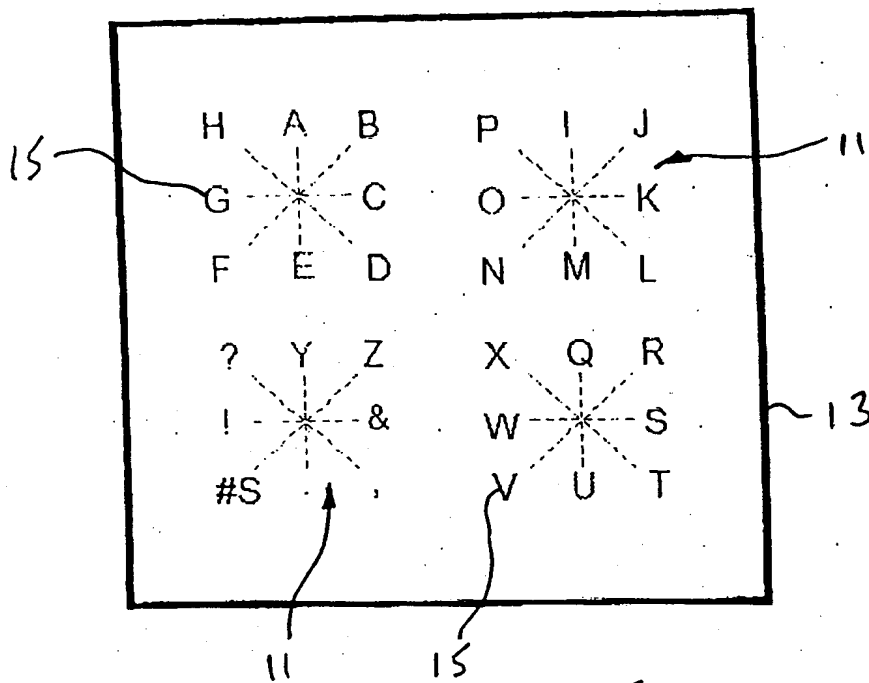


Fig. 2

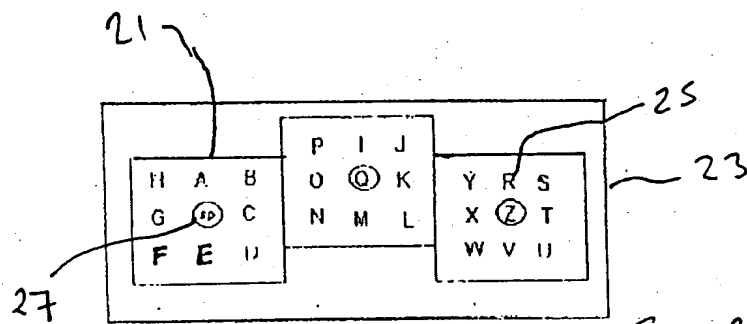


Fig. 3a

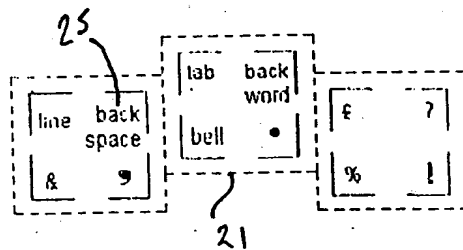


Fig. 3b

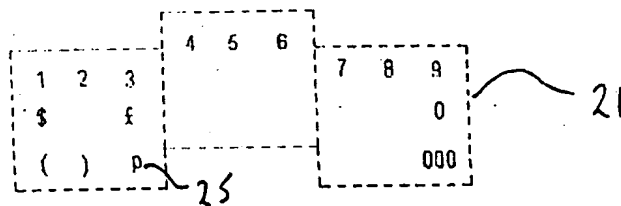
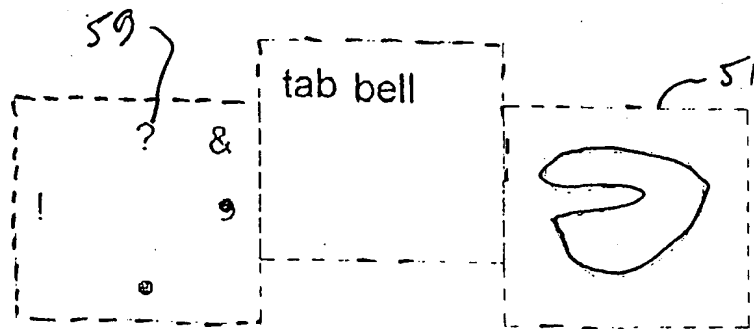
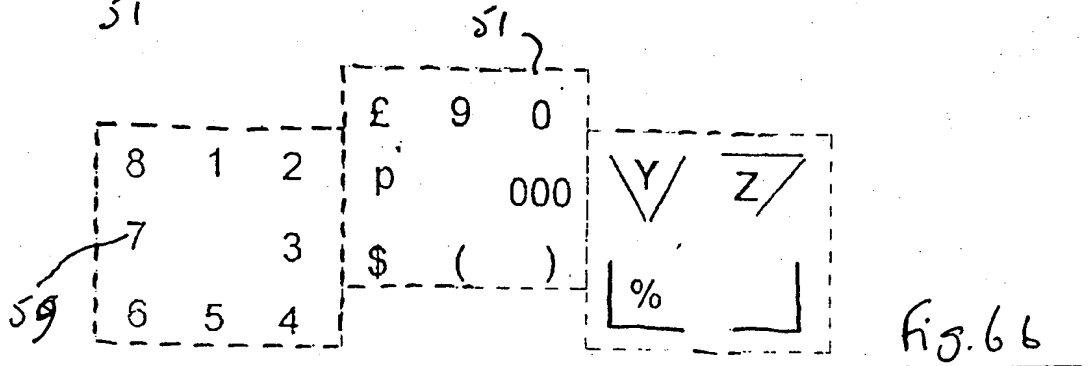
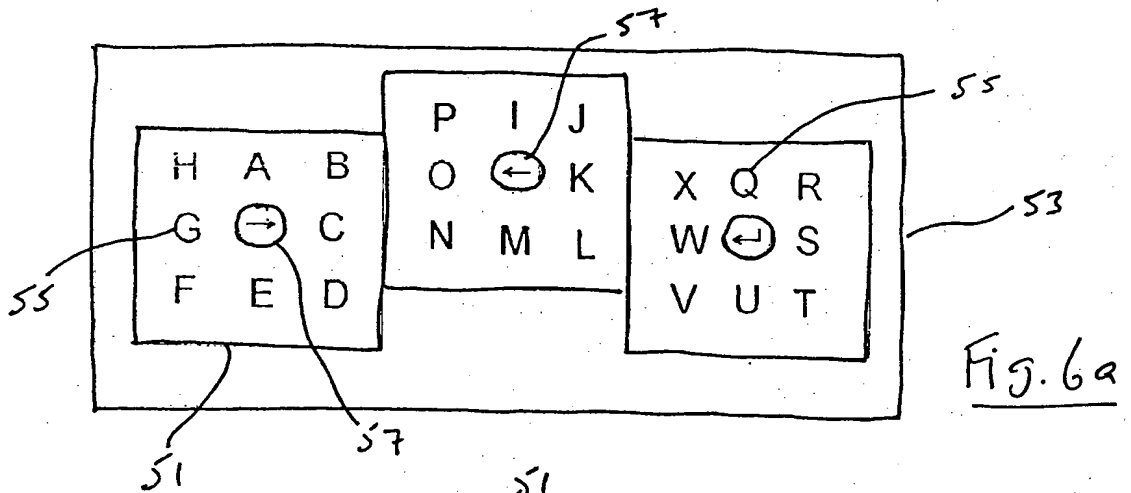
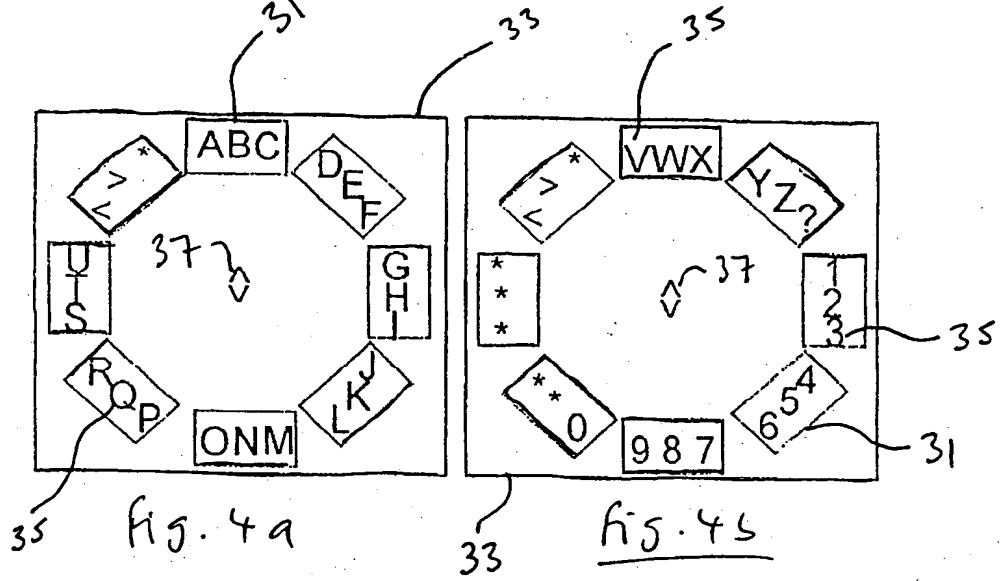


Fig. 3c

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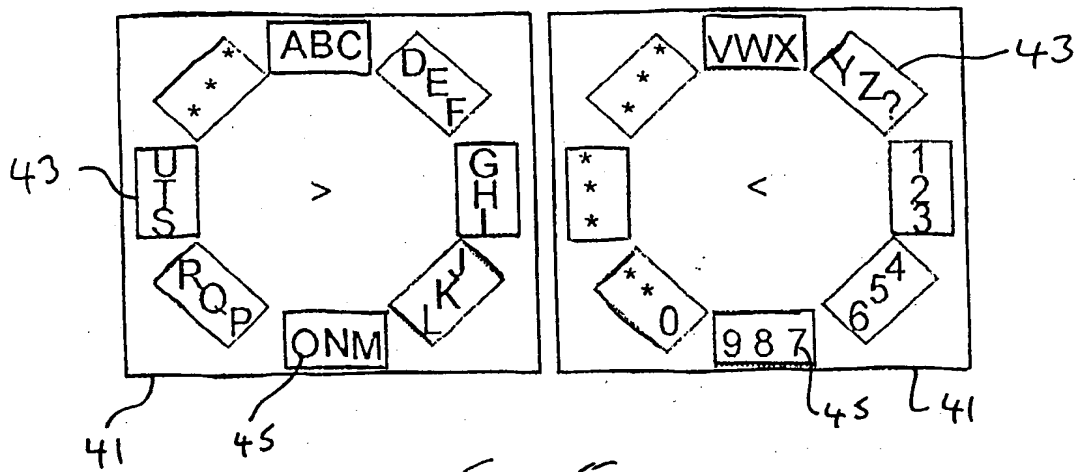


Fig. 5

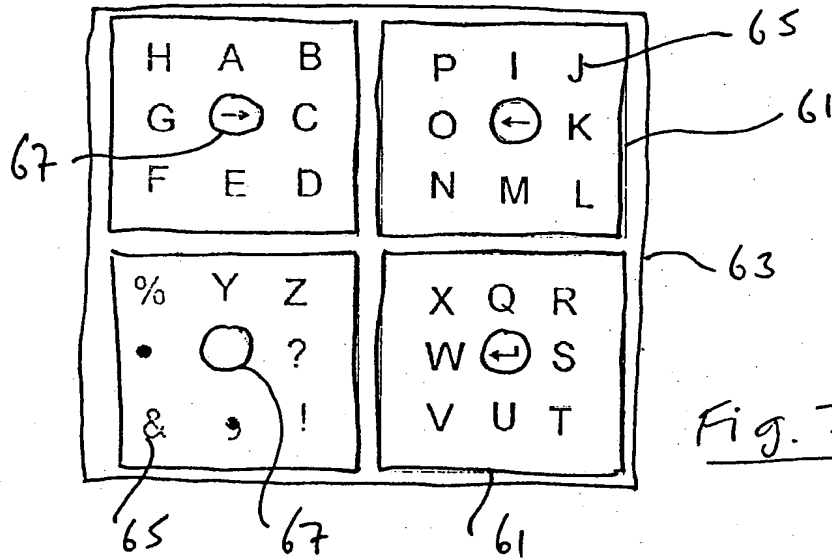


Fig. 7a

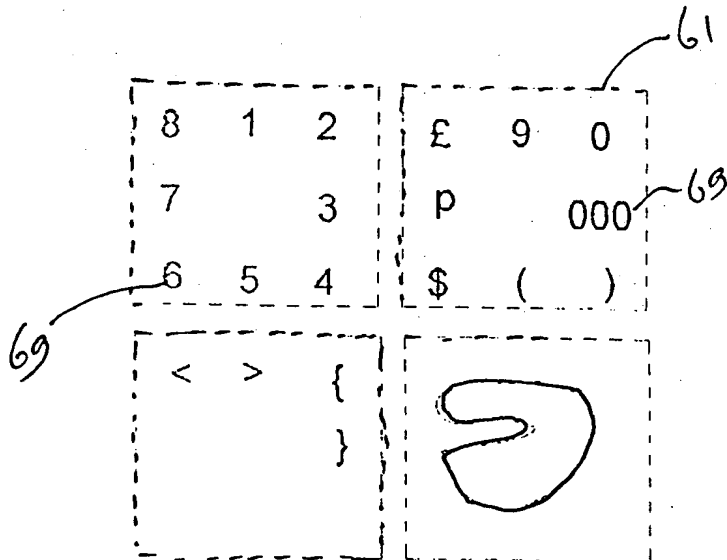


Fig. 7b

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Fig. 8

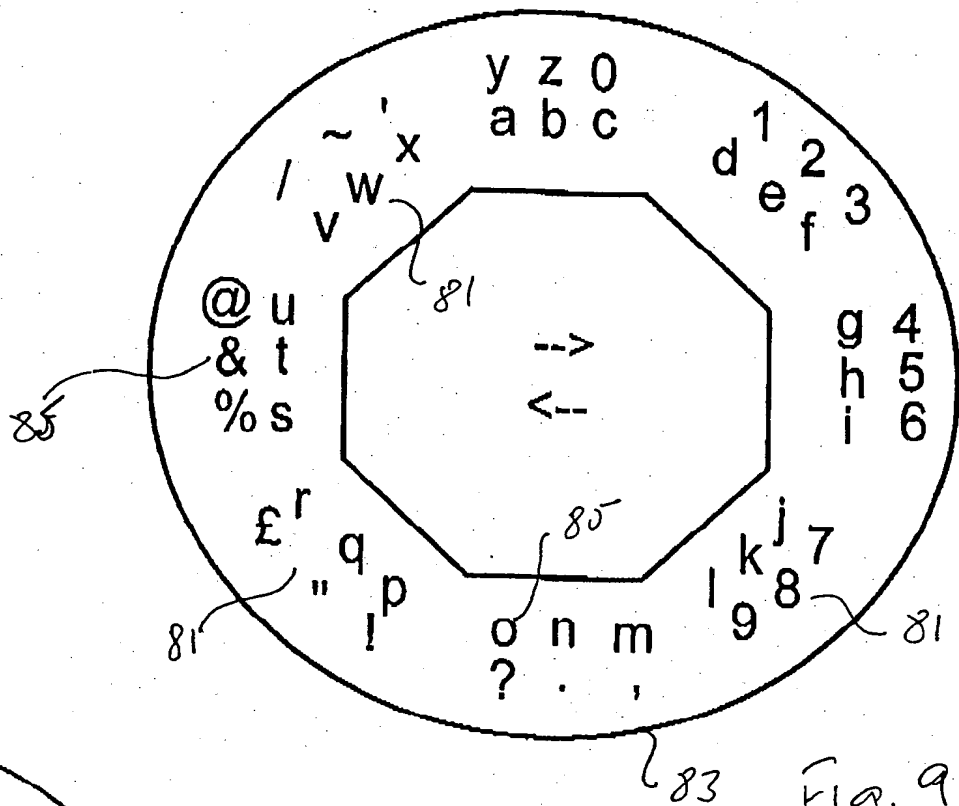
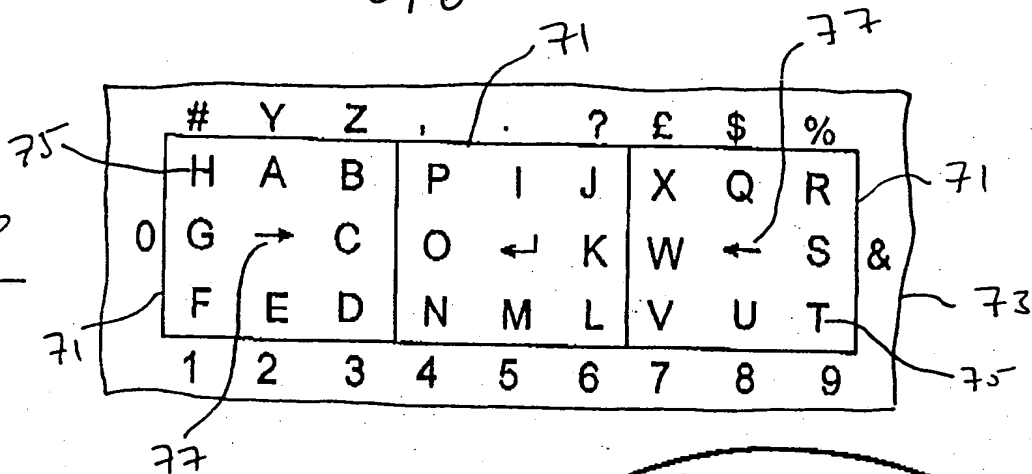


Fig. 9

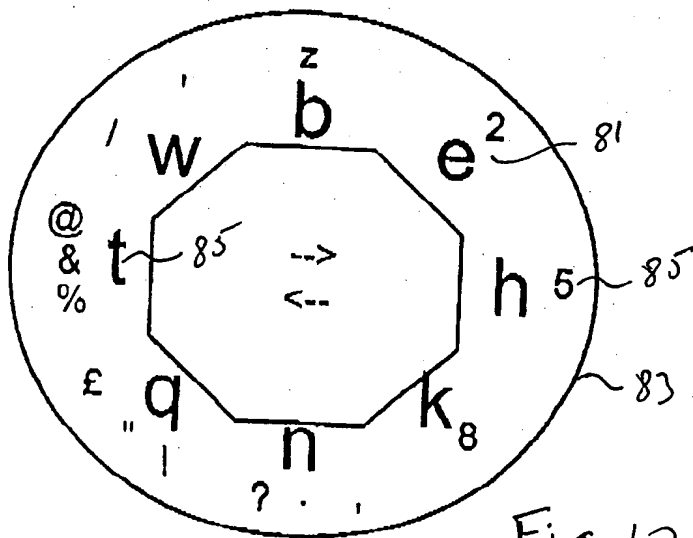
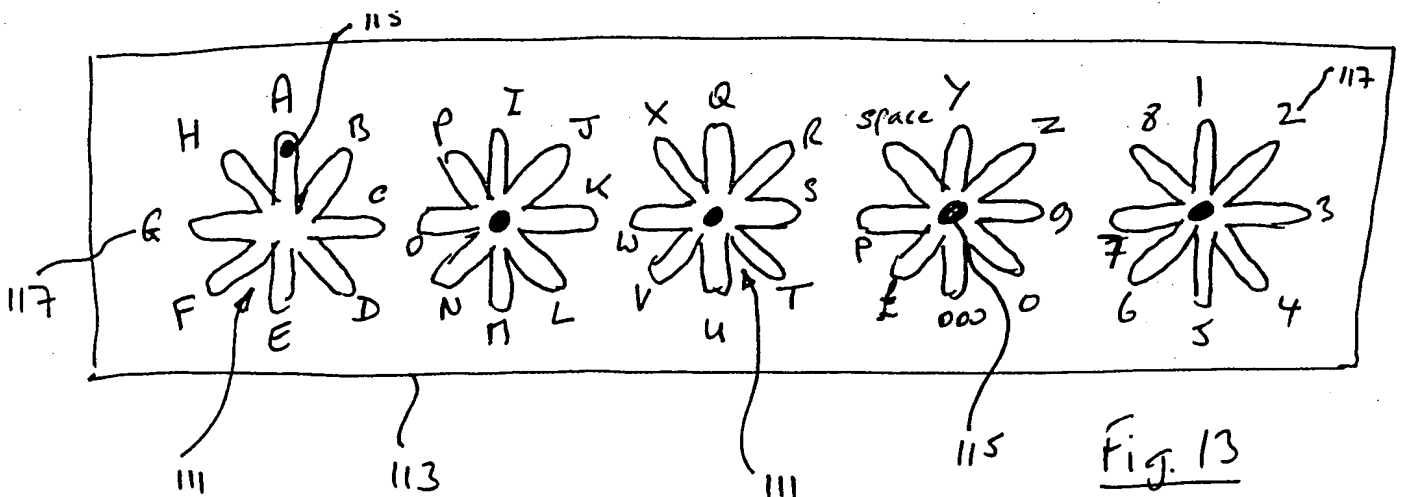
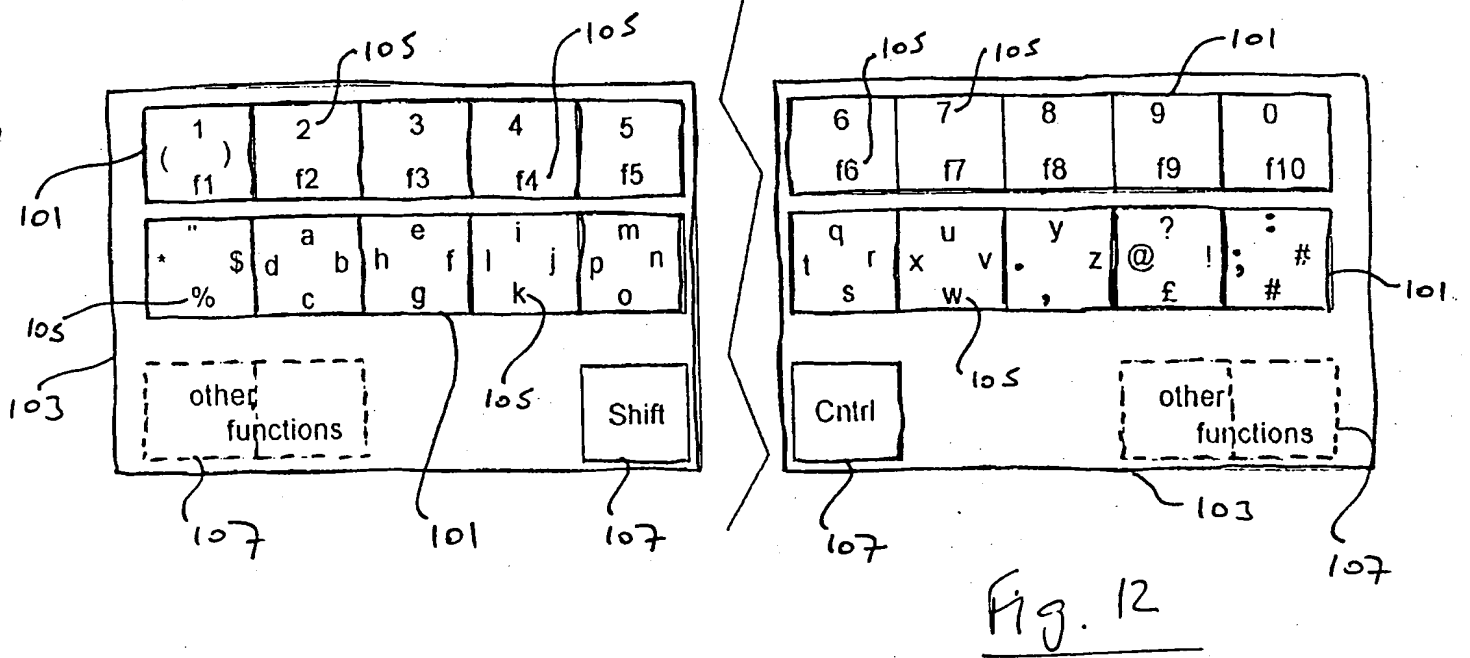
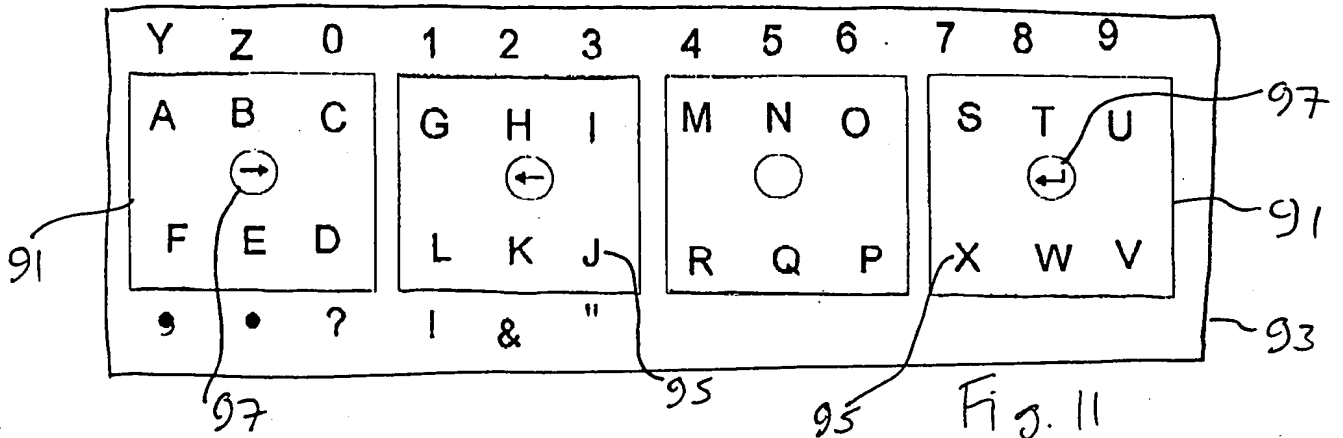


Fig. 10

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